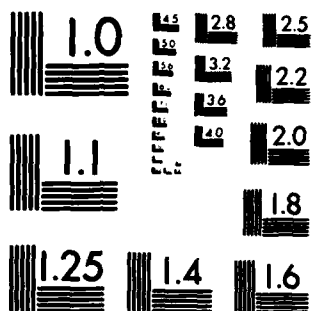


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domestic considerations rule out a significant narrowing, much less closure of this putative gap. Given this reality, certain imperatives are at once manifest to the national security policy makers. Continued reliance on deterrence via mutual assured destruction perpetuates the grievous error of confusing strategic ways with strategic ends. Nuclear war-avoidance is a critically important way we achieve our national end of survival as a free nation; it is not an end in itself. This has urgent implications for US national strategy. After a review of unclassified literature, the author offers an American public perception paradigm that depicts war as a failure of policy; suggests that general war was described by Clausewitz in his abstract concept of pure war; compares and contrasts selected strategic policies of the US and the USSR; and finally, proposes a Presidential initiative to move the United States toward a national strategy for the common defense of peace with freedom.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

TOWARD A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE:  
A PROPOSAL

An Individual Essay

by

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Class of 1984

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# ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: George E. Hunt, LTC, USA

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It is virtually unarguable that the past decade has wrought a relative decline in the military power of the United States in comparison to that of the Soviet Union. Analyses devoted to comparisons of such power invariably focus on military hardware and force sizings. Most informed observers would agree that the resultant military power gap will continue, if not widen, in the next decade. Despite current efforts to modernize American military capabilities, domestic considerations rule out a significant narrowing, much less closure of this putative gap. Given this reality, certain imperatives are at once manifest to the national security policy makers. Continued reliance on deterrence via mutual assured destruction perpetuates the grievous error of confusing strategic ways with strategic ends. Nuclear war-avoidance is a critically important way we achieve our national end of survival as a free nation; it is not an end in itself. This has urgent implications for US national strategy. After a review of unclassified literature, the author offers an American public perception paradigm that depicts war as a failure of policy; suggests that general war was described by Clausewitz in his abstract concept of pure war; compares and contrasts selected strategic policies of the US and the USSR; and finally, proposes a Presidential initiative to move the United States toward a national strategy for the common defense of peace with freedom.

## INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz, a nineteenth century military theoretician, is enjoying something of a rebirth among western military strategists. A handsome sculpture of the general is now prominently displayed at the United States Army War College, whose students are furnished a copy of On War before they begin their year-long course of instruction. The intellectual battle is thus joined early on: Is Clausewitz relevant to the future military leaders of democratic nation-states? What could a nineteenth century thinker imagine about the ways and means of war in the nuclear age?

"War is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means,"<sup>1</sup> asserted Clausewitz. The continuum of policy options available to sovereign states, therefore, is said to be marked by diplomacy at one extreme with war at the opposite. This simplistic construct may accurately reflect Clausewitz' conclusion; the issue is whether war can be an instrument of political policy in the nuclear age.

This brief paper offers an American public perception paradigm that depicts war as a failure of policy; suggests that general war in the nuclear age was described by Clausewitz in his abstract concept of absolute war; compares and contrasts selected strategic policies of the United States and the USSR

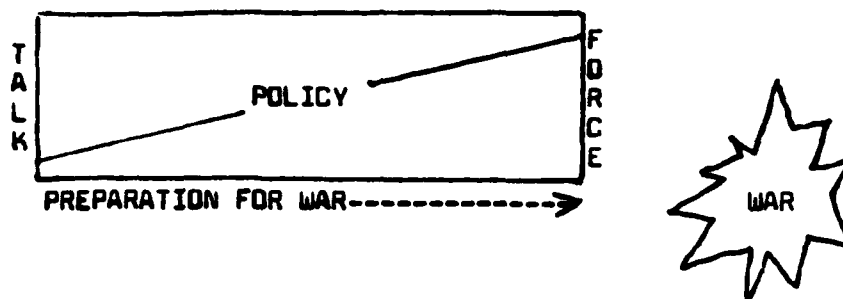


in the context of Clausewitz' dictum; and finally, proposes an initiative to move the United States toward a national strategy for the common defense of peace with freedom.

#### PUBLIC PERCEPTION

It seems a fair statement that the American people regard with deep suspicion the concept of war as one of several political options, a mere tool in the hands of our lowly-regarded politicians. Periodically, the media report results of American public opinion surveys, in which the esteem we have for our elected officials is described as tantamount to our regard for used car salesmen. Can we really trust our most precious asset, our freedom, to these same politicians? On the other hand, conventional academic wisdom to the contrary notwithstanding, Americans are not averse to force or violence, but are loath to strike the first blow. We will fiercely and vigorously defend ourselves, but we will not start the fight. We Americans, in defense of our interests, are not the least reluctant to draw the line on the ground, which a prospective opponent crosses at his own peril. We do not shrink from the use of violence, nor do we hesitate to maintain the substance necessary to lend credence to our threats of force if we are provoked. Americans can fairly be regarded as useful friends or fierce enemies, who would prefer to live in harmony with their neighbors. Generalized to a national style or ethic, one can construct a somewhat simplistic model which depicts the policy parameters within which we expect our elected officials

and public servants to operate.



This model suggests an international milieu in which general war is absent, or as a minimum, where United States military forces are not actively engaged in conflict termination on a large scale. Neither pole of the spectrum is seen as absolute; the diagonal line depicts this state of affairs. Within the policy box we have the use of all peaceful tools available to other actors in the international arena, namely, political, economic, diplomatic, military, scientific and psychosocial powers, explicit and implicit. At one extreme we may see a threateningly massive show of military force, such as a joint or combined readiness exercise in Central America. At the other pole one would find, for example, a military security alliance, most-favored nation trade status, the sharing of advanced technology, amicable diplomatic relations, and so forth. At different points along the spectrum one will invariably find an admixture of policy options being employed simultaneously; for example, trade negotiations (talk) with the USSR occurring concomitantly with the deployment of Pershing II missiles to

Western Europe (implicit force).

Underlying this intercourse spectrum is the public demand that we have the military power, if not superior to all other nation-states, at least clearly sufficient to dissuade any nation from exercising the "pathological aberration" of war against us. War, then, is seen by the American people as a failure of policy.

The late President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned the world that in any outbreak of general hostilities between the super-powers, destruction would be both reciprocal and complete. Can one logically conclude, therefore, that in this nuclear age we have come to a repudiation of Clausewitz' dictum?

#### ABSOLUTE WAR

To consider this question let us turn to Clausewitz' postulation of absolute war. Although as Bernard Brodie argues, Clausewitz' treatment of the pure concept of war may be nothing more than a stylistic nod to Kantian or Hegelian technique, it may indeed rather be prophetic. Was Clausewitz painting a picture of general nuclear war when he described the abstract perfection of war as possible if:

(a) war were a wholly isolated act, occurring suddenly; (b) it consisted of a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones; (c) the decision achieved was complete and perfect in itself. . .?<sup>2</sup>

Clausewitz himself dismisses this metaphysical idea with a consideration of the realities as he knew them in the early 1800s, arguing that "war is an act of policy. Were it a complete,

untrammeled, absolute manifestation of violence (as the pure concept would require), war would of its own independent will usurp the place of policy."<sup>3</sup> Pure war, in other words, is not an act of policy. It is not a political instrument. If unleashed, it is a failure of policy. Pure war is madness, the absence of rationality.

If this be so, would not rational political leaders promptly renounce pure, absolute war as an available instrument of national policy? Would realpolitik permit such a political declaration by nuclear-capable states? Even though the answers to these questions be no, one may argue that Clausewitz has not been repudiated by the reality of late twentieth century technology which has made possible the "complete, untrammeled, absolute manifestation of violence." Such violence is not war but suicide. War, to be a political act for political ends must be a contest between wills, with loss to one gain to the other, a contest admitting to a winner and a loser where, in Clausewitz' words, "the result is never final," not where the contestants are both utterly and completely losers.

Twelve years ago, an editorial in the Wall Street Journal praised on the one hand the strategic arms limitation agreements which ratified the mutual assured destruction strategies of the two superpowers; on the other hand, such "mutual deterrence means no rational man would deliberately start a nuclear war, but who ever said war is likely to be started by the deliberate plan of rational men?"<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz said it, 150 years ago, before the

world reached the point where the only sanity is madness.

### SOVIET STRATEGIC CONCEPTS

If for the sake of argument, the reader accepts the foregoing as a fair assessment of American public sentiment toward the unthinkable, one cannot safely impute a similar viewpoint to the Soviet leadership. In a growing body of literature devoted to the analysis of actual Soviet strategic doctrine, scholars are discovering military precepts quite dissimilar to our own. According to Harvard Professor Richard Pipes, recently of the National Security Council staff, "the strategic doctrine adopted by the USSR over the past two decades calls for a policy diametrically opposite to that adopted in the United States: not deterrence but victory, not sufficiency in weapons but superiority, not retaliation but offensive action." In other words, Clausewitz may have been buried in the United States, but he lives in Moscow. Pipes concluded, ". . . as long as the Soviets persist in adhering to the Clausewitzian maxim on the function of war, mutual deterrence is feasible only if we understand the Soviet war-winning strategy and make it impossible for them to succeed."<sup>5</sup>

Let us postulate that we, as rational men, do understand the Soviet war-fighting and war-winning doctrine. Can we articulate the imperatives for American national strategy?

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Most thoughtful Americans would agree that the paramount purpose of the United States is to protect and preserve the Nation in accord with the principles embodied in the Constitution. The objective of our policy to achieve this fundamental purpose would seem to be general nuclear war-avoidance. This does not, however, necessarily follow; it is, in fact, a grievous error. War-avoidance may indeed be one of the ways of achieving the paramount national purpose, but it is not a strategic objective. To amplify, we could "lose" Central American states to Communism; indeed, we could also simultaneously or sequentially "lose" the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Yet by avoiding general nuclear war -- more specifically avoiding an attack on the United States -- we have not enhanced preservation of our Nation. We have merely acquiesced in the erosion of our national security and significantly lowered the probability of success in achieving our ultimate purpose -- self-preservation -- by mistakenly seeking nuclear war-avoidance as a national objective via the strategy of deterrence through mutual assured destruction, or MAD. MAD does not rise to the level of strategy; it is a passive notion that may lull Americans into a false sense of security, but it has not dissuaded the Soviets from developing the ways and means to fight, and in their view, to win a nuclear war.

The Soviet national purpose is surely close, if not identical in part, to our own; the strategy to achieve that ultimate goal of

self-preservation postulates wholly different strategic objectives. If their grand strategic objective is to achieve ideological hegemony in the world, they have at least two ways to do so:

(a) Develop and maintain the offensive capability to convince the world that a nuclear war is impossible to win and must be avoided at all costs (assured destruction); and

(b) Develop the defensive technological capability to negate a nuclear attack upon the Soviet Union (assured survival).

Using General Maxwell Taylor's characterization of strategy (which defines strategy as Ends plus Ways plus Means), we can clearly contrast US and Soviet approaches:<sup>6</sup>

#### SOVIET STRATEGY

End - Victory  
+Ways - Assured Destruction;  
Assured Survival  
+Means - Superior military capabilities;  
Offensive doctrine.

#### AMERICAN STRATEGY

End - Deterrence  
+Ways - Assured Destruction  
+Means - Sufficient military capabilities;  
Defensive doctrine.

For the American policy maker, the foregoing suggests a thorough-going dilemma, for as we have seen, Americans consider war (hence war-fighting, war-winning) as a failure of policy, not an instrument. It seems reasonable to conclude that the public would never support a bellicose, offensive policy whose end was victory, even against the ominous threat of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, the American public has traditionally been willing to invest its treasure in order to secure our liberty and to provide for the defense of our nation. That is not the issue. The debate is over how we can defend ourselves. What means shall we employ to assure our survival as a free nation? What strategy will the American people support, given the growing fear of nuclear war? As we have suggested, the answer does not seem to be an ever-increasing investment in offensive, war-fighting nuclear weapons. Similarly, the mutual elimination of nuclear weapons by both superpowers is not a realistic course of action, given the seemingly implacable mistrust on both sides.

A defensive strategy to assure our survival employing defensive means is the logical policy: it would achieve our national purpose, appeal to our sense of fair play, accommodate our defensive nature, and offer the promise of reducing future expenditures for offensive strategic weapons.

Analysis of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger's Report to the Congress for fiscal years 1984 and 1985 suggests that the Reagan Administration is moving inexorably in that direction. Elements of the emerging American defense strategy can be inferred from public pronouncements thusly:



## AMERICAN STRATEGY

- End - Peace with Freedom
- +Ways - Strategic Defensive
- +Means - Modernized strategic and conventional  
military capabilities (now-1990s);  
Non-nuclear defense system in outer-  
space (circa 2000).

Peace with freedom as a legitimate national objective clearly captures an implicit element of our national purpose: our Lockean view of the nature of man, who thrives under freedom and justice; our value system extolling human dignity; our ideology. Peace without freedom is immediately attainable with no expenditure of taxpayer dollars; however, no responsible citizen is advocating capitulation or the dismantling of our defense establishment. Those advocating unilateral Western disarmament, neutralism, pacificism, or a neo-isolationist return to Fortress America do not represent the majority of the American body politic. Proponents of such extreme means are simply reflecting the mounting apprehension toward nuclear war as we all search for an answer, the way to prevent the unthinkable. Unlike deterrence as an end, though, Peace with Freedom is a goal which can unify the American public.

What, then, is the major obstacle to our achievement of that laudable objective? Although the threat posed by a mad terrorist with a nuclear device is certainly real, the paramount danger to

the United States, as well as our allies and our friends, is the Soviet arsenal of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

But there is a prominent legal obstacle to the employment of a defensive system which protects against ICBMs: in 1972 the United States and the USSR signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Article I of this agreement commits both parties "not to deploy ABM systems for a defense of its country;" and Article V "not to develop, test, or deploy ABM systems or components which are sea-based, air-based, space-based or mobile land-based."

#### STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE

Nevertheless, President Ronald Reagan announced in a 23 March 1983 address that "consistent with our obligations under the ABM treaty," he was ordering a "comprehensive and intensive effort to define a long-term research and development program to begin to achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles."<sup>7</sup>

Dubbed the "Star Wars" speech by the President's critics in the Congress and the popular press, the skepticism was immediate. The proposal was described variously as prohibitively expensive, technologically impossible, a violation of the ABM treaty, an escalation of the arms race, destabilizing to the extent balance of terror, the decoupling of Europe from American interests, a cruel hoax, counter to American security interests, and so forth.

Defense Secretary Weinberger found it necessary to respond in June 1983, explaining that the President's proposal was not,

adding a reasoned argument outlining why it was a realistic goal. Objective analysts could conclude that Mr. Weinberger satisfactorily addressed the issues, save one. Not a single word was said about the ABM treaty, perhaps with good reason. After all, the United States is years away from the prohibited development, testing or deployment of ABM components. Research is not precluded. And the President had actually called for a feasibility study, an exploration of possible technologies which might offer promise for future exploitation. For now, it would seem, there is no legal impediment to the research proposal. It seems equally evident that such a legal obstacle will inevitably arise in the next several years, in that the ultimate purpose of the research program is "the means of rendering nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete," according to President Reagan.

Mr. Weinberger also answered opponents' assertions that the President's initiative would be destabilizing:

Some, wedded to strategic theories and literature of the past, have called the President's proposal the drive for a first strike capability that would upset superpower stability and provoke the Soviet Union. The President's proposal would, in fact, do just the opposite. An effective shield against ballistic missile attack would prevent aggression by neutralizing an aggressor's offensive capability.

We know the Soviet Union has been working to achieve these same defensive systems for many years, and we hope that they will continue. A truly stable superpower relationship would be one in which both sides were protected from attack (emphasis added).<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt to justify Congressional funding of the President's research program, now officially known as the "Strategic Defense Initiative," Mr. Weinberger's tone turned ominous. After recalling that the Soviets had for years been pursuing vigorous ABM research and development efforts, he reported to the Congress: "Unilateral Soviet deployment of an advanced system capable of countering Western ballistic missiles -- added to the already impressive air and passive defense capabilities -- would weaken deterrence and threaten the security of the United States and its allies (emphasis added)."<sup>9</sup>

In a discussion relevant to Soviet compliance with solemn international agreements, Mr. Weinberger noted that a "new, large phased-array radar that they are now constructing is an almost certain violation of the ABM Treaty." On the other hand, "our proposed research program will be entirely consistent with existing U. S. treaty obligations." Furthermore, results of the Strategic Defense Initiative tests will probably not permit a decision until "the early 1990s on whether to proceed with development of ballistic missile defenses."<sup>10</sup> Within ten years, then, and perhaps sooner, we must decide whether to abrogate or to negotiate an amendment to the ABM treaty.

If we perceive a Soviet ABM system as a threat to our security -- in the absence of a similar American capability -- we must logically concede an identical view to Soviet strategists. The issue is not whether the United States would execute the

first strike option, for we know we would not. The issue is what would the Soviets, with their Hobbesian view of man, believe if we fielded an ABM system before they could?

As of this writing, the superpowers are no longer meeting to discuss arms reductions. The Soviets walked out of the bilateral negotiations in Geneva as a protest against NATO's deployment of Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles. Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko publicly blamed Washington for inhibiting resumption of talks by its uncompromising policies on nuclear arms and weapons in space. What these tense times call for is a bold initiative by President Reagan, capable of gaining the enthusiastic support of our allies, staking out the moral high ground, and supporting his announced goal of peace with freedom.

#### A PROPOSAL

The President should propose publicly that the United States and the Soviet Union jointly undertake a scientific project leading to the employment of a non-nuclear defensive shield in outer-space designed to destroy any ballistic missile launched from the earth. French, British and Chinese scientists could also be included in this Manhattan-like project, in view of the ICBM capabilities of those nations.

Such an international project would offer a wide variety of potential advantages -- to all nations of the world -- paramount of which would be a virtually instant raising of the strategic

nuclear threshold. This bold political initiative would also provide opportunities for equally imaginative diplomatic measures leading to a long-term, gradual reduction of all nuclear weapons.

Today's reality is that the Soviets do not trust Americans, Chinese, British or French. The Chinese are pursuing a policy of equidistance between the two superpowers, aligning with neither. The United States seeks a strategic relationship with the Peoples Republic of China, at the expense of the USSR, in Soviet eyes. The United States in past arms talks with the Soviets could not and would not include French or British ICBMs in the strategic balance equation, weapons which the Soviets prudently maintain are aimed at the USSR. In any event, the ICBM-capable nations do not have to be in agreement on the paramount threat to their own survival. They could all simply agree to work toward a shield against all ICBMs, no matter their markings.

Implementation of this proposal would admittedly pose a number of challenging mechanical questions, straining the credulity and imagination of government officials everywhere. As with any new idea, there would be criticism, internationally and domestically. The Soviets may reject it out of hand as an election year ploy, but we cannot be certain. Let them explain their refusal to the international community.

Given China's emphasis on scientific and technological modernization, could this proposal be the key that American officials have been searching for to develop an enduring strategic relationship with the PRC? If China agreed to

participate in the program, would the Soviets be likely to reconsider an initial refusal?

If after consultations -- not notification -- the British and French agreed to take part, the stage would be set for President Reagan to extend an invitation to the Chinese during his upcoming visit to the PRC. If the Chinese agreed, the President could make the proposal public while in Beijing.

One year ago President Reagan described his strategic defense initiative as "an effort which holds the purpose of changing the course of human history."

"Our only purpose -- one all people share," he said, "is to search for ways to reduce the danger of nuclear war."<sup>11</sup>

Let us also share this worthy American vision with other peoples of the world, in a way that exemplifies our solemn commitment to peace. "We seek neither military superiority nor political advantage," said the President. What we do seek is a world protected from the madness of accidental or calculated strategic nuclear attack.

Let the dedicated scientists of the world have our leadership and our support in a mutual search for a means to render nuclear weapons obsolete. We must step back from the abyss of Clausewitz' absolute war, acknowledging that defensive technology offers the greatest hope for an end to the age of terror. Let us begin -- together.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds., Clausewitz on War, p. 87.
2. Ibid., p. 78.
3. Ibid., p. 87.
4. Wall Street Journal, 13 September 1983, p. 34.
5. Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War," Commentary, July 1977, pp. 21-34.
6. This brief paper necessarily omits references to the many other ways and means available in pursuing strategic ends. This is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive.
7. Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, "Peace and National Security: A New Defense," Vital Speeches of the Day, 15 April 1983. (The President's 23 March 1983 speech).
8. Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, "Seeking a Realistic Strategic Defense," Defense, June 1983.
9. Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1985, 1 February 1984, p. 58.
10. Ibid., pp. 33, 58, 267.
11. Reagan, 23 March 1983 speech.



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